



## About the Group

The *Ashdown Forest Research Group* was formed by a small group of enthusiastic amateur local historians who attended two courses given by Professor Brian Short at the Ashdown Forest Centre in 2010 and 2012, the first about the historical communities of Ashdown Forest, the second about the methods that could be used to research the history of the area. Initially the group was formed with the aim of completing a census-based research project – looking at the changing community of Forest Row in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – that we had begun during the second course but which we were unable to finish before it ended.

Since then the group has continued to meet and to pursue this and other research. The group explores many historical aspects of Ashdown Forest, its effects on the people who have lived or worked on the Forest and its fringes, and the impact the lives and occupations of this scattered community have had on the Forest's landscape. The research has largely been focused on the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and on the communities lying on the northern side of the Forest, in particular Forest Row and Hartfield (largely for practical reasons because the group's current members reside there or close by).

Projects by individual members of the group have included improvements to transport and communications around Ashdown Forest brought by turnpike roads and railways, and their impact; demographic and occupational change in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the connections that existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century between families on the Forest; a Commoner's view of the fires that broke out on the forest in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the provenance of the three old barns that now house the Ashdown Forest Centre at Wych Cross. An important collective enterprise was inspired by the centenary of the First World War, when the group carried out a major four-year project to write case studies on all the men who fell during the war that are commemorated on the war memorials at Forest Row, Hartfield

and Colemans Hatch. Most recently, we have been helping the Conservators by examining some of their archived papers with a view to advising them about what may be retained and what disposed of.

Our emphasis is very much on doing research, and publishing it. Several articles by members of the group have appeared in *Ashdown Forest News*, the magazine of the Friends of Ashdown Forest. We have given talks on the history of Ashdown Forest to the Conservators, the Friends of Ashdown Forest, and local groups. In 2015 and 2017 we held exhibitions of our work at the Ashdown Forest Centre. In April 2018 we conducted a well-received guided historical walk around Forest Row for the Sussex Archaeological Society entitled '*Forest Row: a changing Forest-Edge village*', held in conjunction with the conference it held the previous day, '*Ancient to Modern: the Changing Landscape of Sussex*'.

The Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest have kindly lent their support to the group, providing us with meeting facilities and a dedicated page on their website.

The group currently has six core members. It meets on Tuesday mornings at the Ashdown Forest Centre at Wych Cross about every two months. There is no formal structure to the group and there is no charge for taking part. We simply get together and discuss and progress the projects we have collectively decided to do. Meetings tend to be lively, entertaining, and productive. There is no compulsion to take part in any particular project work, and participation in the group is purely voluntary. Group members are free to pursue their own research interests away from the group.

We're grateful that Professor Short continues to take an active interest in our group and advise us from time to time.

The group's website gives more information about the group and lists its publications (all of which are available for download):

[www.ashdownforestresearchgroup.uk](http://www.ashdownforestresearchgroup.uk)

Anyone interested in joining our group is welcome to contact us by email. The address is:

[enquiries@ashdownforestresearchgroup.uk](mailto:enquiries@ashdownforestresearchgroup.uk)

*Ashdown Forest Research Group*

*Last updated: 11 April 2019*